

The School of Yoga

The Yoga system today is one of the most dynamic schools of Indian philosophy thanks to the spread of Yoga as a life-style choice. The Yoga-sūtras of Patañjali are regularly being studied, but like most of the great sages very little is known about him and there is much controversy about his identity. There is no record of the time of his birth or where he lived but it is suggested that he lived in the 2nd century B.C.E.

Meaning of the term “Yoga”



Patañjali

The word *Yoga* has many meanings. Based upon the root “*yuj*” — to yoke; the meaning derived is *union* — unification of individual consciousness with cosmic consciousness. Yet another meaning of the term is ‘method’ in general, or a ‘way’ or ‘path of action’ (to reach one's goal).

Yoga can also mean ‘restraint’ or ‘control’ and thus connotes a system of discipline leading to control of the body and mind — Yoga being basically a methodology for practical spiritual training.

In the Gīta, Kṛṣṇa defines yoga as “*samatvam*” — balance, harmony.

Ordinary and Extraordinary Knowledge

Patañjali accepts the usual forms of Pramāṇa — perception, inference and verbal testimony which he calls ordinary knowledge, but adds another:— extra-ordinary perception (*yoga-pratyakṣam*) which arises when the mind is enlightened and has attained clarity of vision.

Patañjali advances the theory that ordinary knowledge is characterised by indistinctness because the word, the meaning and the idea are all confused. The word, the idea and the object signified by them are in fact distinct, but due to associative thinking, speculation and imagination (*vitarka*) we get them confused. All ordinary knowledge is of this nature.

But when mind becomes free from this associative thinking and super-imposition of value-judgements, the object appears in its own distinct nature (unmixed with word and meaning), the thought-transformation is called distinct (*nirvitarka*). This is the insight obtained by Yoga.

Patañjali rates knowledge gained from meditative insight (*samādhi*), as of a higher order than that gained from inference and the study of the Scriptures.

It is a knowledge obtained by direct super-conscious experience. Patañjali calls it *prajña* - wisdom. This is true knowledge, essential cognition.

Patañjali’s analysis of the mind forms the basis of Hindu psychology.

Aims of Yoga

Like all systems of Indian philosophy Yoga begins with the empirical experience of suffering (*dukha*) or unsatisfactoriness of life.

Yoga like Sāṅkhya teaches that discriminative awareness (*viveka*) leads to a direct realisation of one's being distinct from the physical world including mind, body and ego and this results in Liberation from all suffering.

The realisation of Self is possible only through the transcendence of the functions of the body, the senses, the mind and the intellect and finally, the ego.

This is the realisation of Self as the free, unlimited consciousness which is above karma, suffering, death and destruction.

Sāṅkhya puts stress on discriminative reasoning as the means of attaining liberation while Yoga lays down a practical path to enlightenment for the practitioner.

Cosmogony

Patañjali accepts the metaphysics of the Sāṅkhya system and himself gives details of the respective natures of the two eternal realities — *puruṣa* and *prakṛti*, and explains their conjunction, as well as their separation.

Patañjali teaches that the Self (*puruṣa*) is pure consciousness. It is not a substance or a subject possessing consciousness as an attribute (either essential or accidental).

In its essence, Self is described as eternal (*nitya*), uncontaminated (*śuci*) and happy (*sukhi*).

When Self attains Liberation, it is supposed to regain its true nature of omniscience and transcendence over every state of being.

Patañjali uses the term *kaivalya* for Liberation — which literally means absolute separation or independence.

Yoga Psychology

According to Sāṅkhya-Yoga system, the individual Self (*ātman* /*Puruṣa*) is, in its own nature, pure consciousness, free from the limitations of the body and the fluctuations of mind (*citta*). But in the process of embodiment the *ātman* is enveloped by ignorance and identifies itself with *citta*. The *ātman* is pure consciousness but it is “reflected” in the *citta*. The apparent or reflected “self” is that which we think of as “I” and is the non-self – *anātman*.

Modifications of Mind — Citta Vṛtti

When the senses come into contact with objects in the external world, they produce thought-waves in the mind (*citta*).

These modifications or thought-waves arising in *Citta* are called *vṛttis* although they do not actually affect the Self they *appear* to affect the Self due to the reflection of consciousness in the *Citta* – just as the moon reflected in the ocean appears to be moving as the surface undulates.

Contact with sense-objects arouses the desire to engage in some way with them – an ego-identification which is expressed as “I experience this”, “I suffer this”, “I love this”, “I hate this”.

Discriminative wisdom (*viveka*) leads to the restraint of the activity of the senses and the mind and the cessation all the modifications of *Citta*. When the waves of empirical consciousness (*kārya-citta*) settle, the *Citta* attains a state of perfect equanimity and clarity

(*kāraṇa-citta*), one then attains the realisation that one is not the mind-body complex and is free, immortal and self-shining consciousness and bliss.

The ultimate aim of Yoga is to bring about this experience of enlightenment through the cessation of the modifications of Citta (*citta-vṛtti-nirodhaḥ*).

The Five Afflictions

The source of all existential suffering is due to five afflictions called the *pañca-kleśas* which are:—

1. Ignorance of the true nature of all phenomena (*avidya*),
2. Sense of individualism or personality (*asmitā*),
3. Attraction and attachment to those things which are agreeable (*rāga*),
4. Aversion and hatred for those things which we find disagreeable (*dveṣa*),
5. Clinging to life caused by the delusive identification with the body/mind complex and everything associated with it (*abhiniveśa*).

Actually, the root cause of all suffering is *ignorance*.

Ignorance is defined as accepting the non-eternal (*anitya*), the contaminated (*aśuci*), the painful (*dukhi*) and the non-self (*anātma*) to be the eternal (*nitya*), the pure (*śuci*), the pleasurable (*sukhi*) and the Self (*ātma*).

As long as one does not have *Right Knowledge* there cannot be true discrimination or freedom from suffering.

Cognitive Mental States

The five afflictions are the sources of the many and varied cognitive mental states, which produce both pleasure (*sukha*) and pain (*dukha*) – they can all be broadly classified under five headings:—

1. *Pramāṇa* ascertaining the truth of a matter through the three means of:—
 pratyakṣa – direct evidence or personal perception
 anumāna – inference of the unknown from the known
 āgama – acceptance of the testimony of a reliable authority
2. *viparyāya* mistaken views which are realised to be such after deeper investigation into the subject – not seeing things as they really are.
3. *vikalpa* fancy or imagination – feelings based upon imaginary causes.
4. *nidrā* sleep – absence of cognitive thought processes, bad dreams or hallucinations caused by preponderance of 'Tamas' in Citta.
5. *smṛtī* remembrance – clinging to past memories and experiences, and desiring to relive them, or preserve them.

Mind and its Five Layers

The mind consists of five layers or *bhūmi* –

- *Mūḍha* (Torpidity) – This condition obtains due to excess of Tamas in Citta (mind) and results in a tendency towards self-gratification at the expense of others, delusion, laziness, lack of motivation, sleep etc. – it is the deluded mind which is not at all interested in Yoga.
- *ksipta* (Restlessness) – In this state the mind is under the sway of both Rajas and Tamas and is involved with sense-gratification and the means of attaining power. It leaps like a monkey from one thing to another without resting for long on any one thing, there is the perpetual internal dialogue and this condition can be remedied by Yoga – it is the state of the uncontrolled mind.
- *vikṣipta* (placed) – Here mind is predominantly under the influence of Sattva and has only a touch of Rajas in it. It has capacity for insight and leads to altruism, virtue, knowledge etc. The mind is capable of temporary concentration on some object, which is followed by distraction. This state is conducive to Yoga.
- *ekāgra* (focussed) – Here, the mind is free from the impulses of Rajas. At this level, one has the capacity for prolonged concentration and the perspicuous perception of objects in their true nature. This is a very positive state of Yoga practice in which the mind is being worked upon but the mental process are not altogether arrested.
- *niruddha* (Restrained) – This is the state of the enlightened mind where there is complete cessation of all cognitive processes including even the previous stages of 'ekāgra'. Here mind or Citta is left in its original, unmodified state of tranquillity and clarity.

The Powers of the Mind

The powers of the mind are divided into three broad categories:–

iccha śakti – the power of volition, desire, sensation and planning

jñāna śakti – the power of knowledge – the receiving of impressions from the external world, understanding them and reacting to them.

kriya śakti – the power of voluntary and involuntary action.

Cognition

There are 5 stages associated with the cognitive thought process:–

vedana – the perception or feeling through the five sense organs in which data is transferred from the external world through the senses to Manas.

bhāvana – the ego then introduces imagination into the equation.

manīṣa – judgement, comparison, qualifying and quantifying then come into play.

saṅkalpa – a resolution to act or not to act or to remain indifferent is then made; this motivation for skilful or unskilful acts leads to the creation of Karma.

Smaraṇa – action results either in pleasure or pain which is retained.

The Way Mind Operates

Every mental modification (*vṛtti*) leaves behind an impression called *samskāra* which is a ‘residual potency’ or ‘subliminal activator’.

No modification of the mind is ever lost and so these *samskāras* lie dormant in Citta, receding into a subconscious state as it were, lying low, ready to manifest whenever a suitable occasion arises by the power of associative thinking.

If the same *vṛttis* or similar ones are repeated, the *svabhāva* (disposition) is enhanced and strengthened and issues forth in the appropriate course of *karma* (action) and so the cycle continues.

Even meditative states (*samādhi*) produce *samskāras*. According to Yoga psychology all the *samskāras* of previous *vṛttis* must be destroyed, so that the latter can never shoot up again.

Samskāras produced through meditation by single thought-waves, focussing on one subject, over-rides all other thought-waves and destroys all past potencies.

In the highest states of *samādhi* one reaches a stage called *nirvīja*, ie, seedless, which means that no seeds of desire, attachment or any phenomenal impressions are left.

Once all the modifications and *samskāras* are destroyed the Self is revealed in his own nature (*svarūpa*) — which is pure, undifferentiated consciousness.

But attainment of *nirvīja samādhi* requires tremendous power of focus and restraint of mental processes.

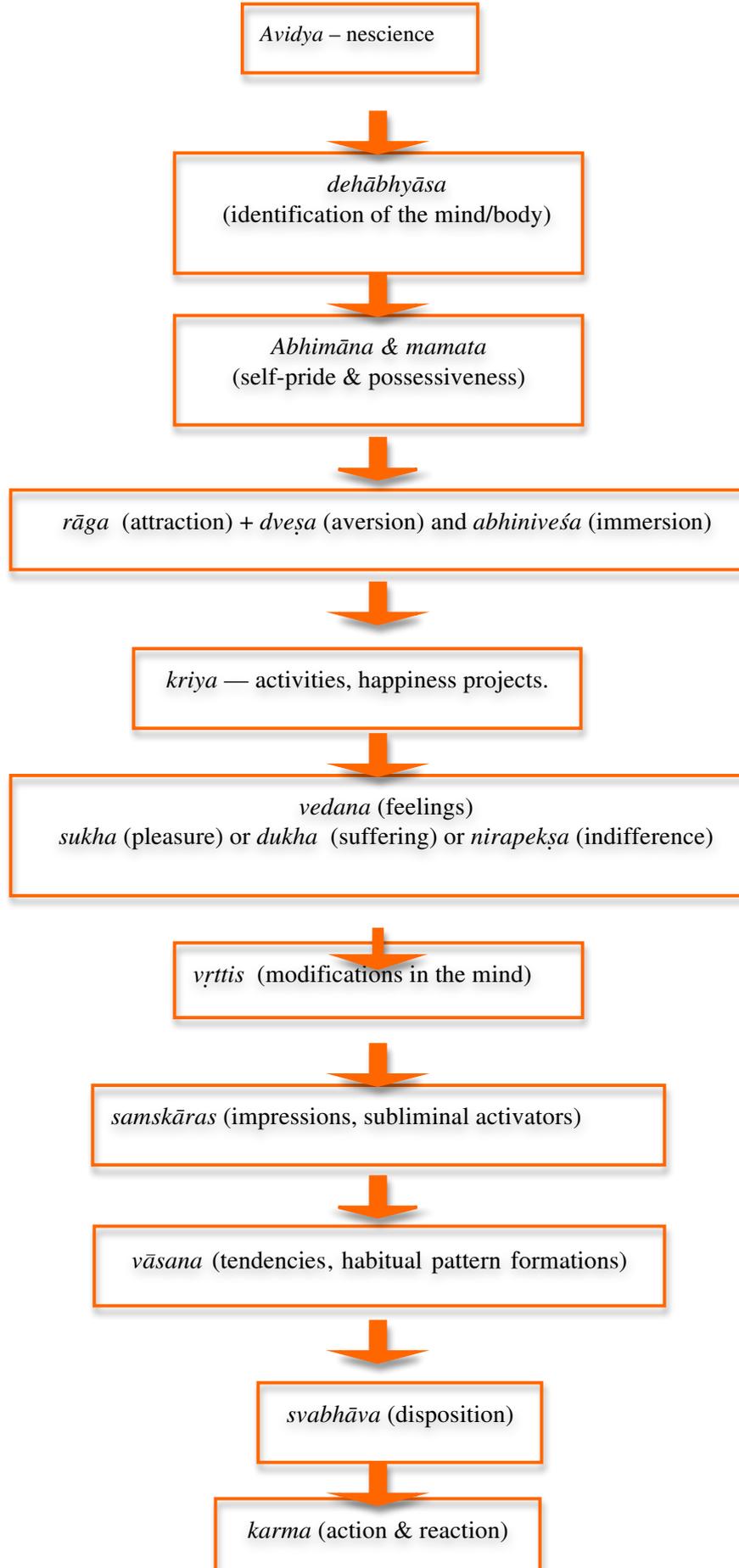
The ultimate state of enlightenment or self-realisation is dependant upon continued Yoga practice (*abhyāsa*) and the cultivation of dispassion (*vairāgya*) which is defined as freedom from desire for both perceptible and future enjoyment (eg., heaven).

The Path of Eight-Fold Means

There are eight limbs of Yoga called *aṣṭhāṅga* which is the methodology presented by Patañjali for the cultivation of the mind and for its purification from all the dross of the six afflictive emotions which are: —

- *Kāma* — selfish desire, the self-referent desire that promotes one’s own interest above the interests of others.
- *Krodha* — anger, the reaction to a frustrated desire, hope or expectation.
- *Moha* — delusion, the identification of the Self with the body mind complex and the resultant concepts of “I” and “mine”.
- *Mada* — arrogance, thinking of oneself as superior, better and more capable than others, and disparaging them.
- *Lobha* — stinginess, the lack of generosity or not sharing one’s surplus resources with others.
- *Mātsarya* — envy, malicious jealousy of the prosperity, attainment or happiness of others.

When these eight limbs of Yoga are practised regularly with dedication and dispassion, they lead to clarity of vision and stilling of the mind which actualise in enlightenment and freedom from suffering.



1. Yama – Self-restraint

1. *Ahiṃsa* – abstention from injury to sentient beings in word, deed or thought. This is an absence of aggression towards others but does not mean that one should not protect oneself and others from malicious attack.
2. *satyam* – speaking the truth which is beneficial and practicing truthfulness as harmony in thought, word and deed directed at the welfare of all sentient beings.
3. *asteya* – refraining from taking that which is not given, or using for oneself what is meant for others.
4. *brahma-carya* – translated as celibacy but it refers more commonly to the period of studentship in which certain restraints are practiced one of them being sexual restraint, but more generally to constant mindfulness of the goal, application to study and practice.
5. *aparigraha* – non-acceptance of gifts from others. This concept has a more technical application. ‘Merely accepting a thing (from another) does not constitute *parigraha* or *pratigraha* (as understood in Dharma-śāstra). This term is applicable only to a particular kind of acceptance viz. when a person accepts what is given by the donor with the notion that he (the donor) will derive from that act of giving some unseen spiritual result or merit (*adr̥ṣṭa* or *pun̄ya*) and when in making the gift a vedic mantra is repeated. When one gives alms, no mantra (such as '*devasya tvā*') is repeated and hence that is not the *dāna* spoken of by śāstra, nor does any one apply the word *pratigraha* to the acceptance of an article given through affection to a friend or a servant.’

The practice of these restraints will prevent the generation of more negative karma through the strengthening of the positive samskāras already present in the mind.

Ahiṃsa is considered to be the best of all restraints because it has both negative and positive applications. Besides being simply non-violence, it also connotes the positive virtues of friendliness, sympathy, loving kindness and compassion.

2. Niyama – Self-development.

This refers to the cultivation of the following good habits:–

1. *śauca* – purity both of the external body called *bāhya* and purification of mind named *abhyantara*, The former state is achieved by general hygiene and taking wholesome food while the latter state requires the cultivation of good intentions.
2. *santośa* – the cultivation of contentedness with whatever comes of itself without undue exertion.
3. *tapas* – austerity or forbearance which consists in enduring all the pairs of opposites with equanimity – cold and heat, praise and blame etc.
4. *svādhyāya* – study of spiritual texts and self-reflection and assessment.
5. *īśvara-praṇidhāna* – surrender to Īśvara. Deity practice which is the meditation upon Deities and the practice of taking refuge.

3. Āsana – Posture.

These are the physical exercises which lead to the control of the body and to fitness and health with perfect poise and equilibrium.

These āsanas are required to keep the body free from disease and are a necessary prelude to work on the mind.

Patañjali doesn't elaborate on these but merely says the postures should be comfortable and firm. Other works like the haṭha Yoga Pradīpika and Gheranda Samhita etc. give further details.



4. Prāṇāyāma – Breath Control

Regulation of the breath is a technique designed to purify the subtle channels and centres of the astral body.

Through the correct channelling of Prāṇa or life-force the psychic centres are prepared for activation through the meditation.

The more developed the control and suspension of breath, the more prolonged the state of concentration that can be achieved.

5. Pratyahāra – Withdrawal of Senses;

This is the first stage of the meditative process and requires the practitioner to begin the long and arduous task of internalising the mind by restraining its repeated attempts to follow the senses and refocussing on the centring device – the breath, or a mantra.

These preliminary five steps are regarded as external aids to Yoga (*bahiraṅga-sādhana*) and the remaining three stages are called internal aids to Yoga (*antaraṅga-sādhana*) and are the final stages of meditation proper.

Stages of Meditation

6. Dhāraṇa – Focus.

In this stage the mind is held steadily focussed (*ekāgrata*) upon a chosen object which may be one's navel, the midpoint of the eye brows or an external object such as the sky, the moon or the image of a deity etc. There are many different types of objects that can be chosen according to the personal disposition, stage of development and ability of the practitioner.



7. Dhyāna – Meditation.

The earlier two stages are preliminaries which can be practiced, but this stage of meditation proper is not a “doing” but a “being”. One gets a clear and distinct representation of the object first by parts and aspects and then after sustained and continued practice the mind develops the same into a full and live presentation. Thus dhyāna reveals the reality of the contemplated object to the mind.

8. Samādhi – Absorption.

This is the final stage in the practice of Yoga where the mind is so deeply absorbed in the object of contemplation that it loses itself in the object and has no awareness of itself as subject. In the state of *dhyāna*, the meditator, the act of meditation and the object of meditation remain distinct and separate states of consciousness. But in samādhi the act of meditation is subsumed; it takes on the form of the object and loses itself, as it were. So here only the object of thought remains shining in the mind and the process of thought vanishes, this is the state of *niruddha* or cessation of the modifications of the mind.

This is the state of total absorption in the object of contemplation in which no waves at all disturb the tranquillity of the mind. This is the final stage of Yoga – the final goal of life ie, liberation or freedom from all pain and suffering. This final stage can not be attained all at once but it requires a long, careful and constant practice of Yoga to remain in a steady state of samādhi which destroys the effects of the different kinds of Karma, past and present.

Yogic Powers

A Yogin is believed to acquire certain extraordinary power by the practice of Yoga in its different stages. But all spiritual aspirants are warned not to practice Yoga with these ends in view. Yoga is for the attainment of liberation and one should not get entangled in the lure of yogic powers.

Citta vikṣepa – distractions from the spiritual practice.

vyādhi – sickness or physical ailments which disturb ones ability to practice.

styāna – languor – lack of the right attitude for practice.

Samśaya – doubt which has not been resolved or indecision about practice.

daurmānasya – despair or depression.

dukha – sorrow, pain, misery.

pramāda – indifference or insensibility, lack of mindfulness – lack of humility.

ālasya – laziness.

avirati – craving for sense–gratification.

Bhrānti-darśana – acceptance of false teachings or the inability to perceive things as they really are.

alabdha bhūmikatva – failure to persist in the practice.

anavasthitatva – inability to persevere in concentration which has been practiced for some time.

The Fourfold Remedy – bheṣajam catuṣṭhaya

The Yoga texts suggest that the way to overcome the distractions from spiritual practice is to cultivate the four remedial measures which are:–

1. *maitri* – friendliness – the feeling of oneness with the object of friendliness
2. *karuṇa* – compassion – feeling misery at the sight of suffering sentient beings and begetting a strong desire to alleviate their suffering.

3. *muditā* – rejoicing – feeling joy in the puṇya done by another, feeling joy in the success of others
4. *upekṣa* – equanimity – to what others are doing to achieve happiness. As well as indifference to praise and blame, heat and cold, virtue and vice etc.

The Place of God in Patañjali's Yoga System

Yoga, as taught by Patañjali, is the path to enlightenment and liberation from suffering by self-reliance on the part of the individual. Under these circumstances, God is not relevant to Liberation. *Prakṛiti*, being the matrix of energy and matter, evolves the world on its own. God is thus not even the creator of the world.

Patañjali is the first of the philosophers to introduce the idea of Deity for practical reasons. He did not consider that there was any necessity to postulate a God for solving any theoretical problem of philosophy or cosmology.

God is neither the creator of the world, nor the moral governor or dispenser of Karma; He does not reward or punish anyone for their actions.

The Deity is introduced on practical grounds only as just one of the aids to concentration. In Patañjali's view, taking Refuge in a God or Goddess is one of the means for the final attainment of samādhi Yoga and hence considered to be of great practical value.

It was the efforts of subsequent commentators and interpreters of Yoga, who worked out an elaborately system of theology.

According to these commentators the Godhead is perfect, eternal, omnipresent, omnipotent and omniscient.

The Godhead differs from the individual selves in that they are subjected to the afflictions (*kleśas*) of ignorance, egoism, desire, aversion and death. They also become involved in good, bad and neutral 'Karmas' and reap the consequences thereof.

They are also possessed of and influenced by the latent impressions of their past experiences whereas the Godhead is eternally free from all these limitations and defects.

The following arguments are produced for the proving the existence of God:–

- (1) The Sacred Scriptures – the Vedas, Upaniṣads etc., declare the existence of the Brahman as the Supreme Self, ultimate reality, the Ground of Being and the goal of spiritual aspiration.
- (2) According to law of continuity, there are different magnitudes, the small (like atom) and the great (like ākāśa or space). Similarly, there are different degrees of knowledge and power. So a person who possess perfect knowledge and perfect power is the highest and Supreme Being and He is accepted as God, as no individual self can be equal to Him in power and knowledge.
- (3) The creation of the world is due to the union of 'Puruṣa' with 'Prakṛti' and its dissolution to their disunion. 'Puruṣa' and 'Prakṛti' being two independent principles cannot be said to be naturally related or associated. Therefore, there must be Cosmic Intelligence, an omniscient Being who brings about the association or dissociation between 'Puruṣa' or 'Prakṛti', according to the karma of individuals – this Being is God.